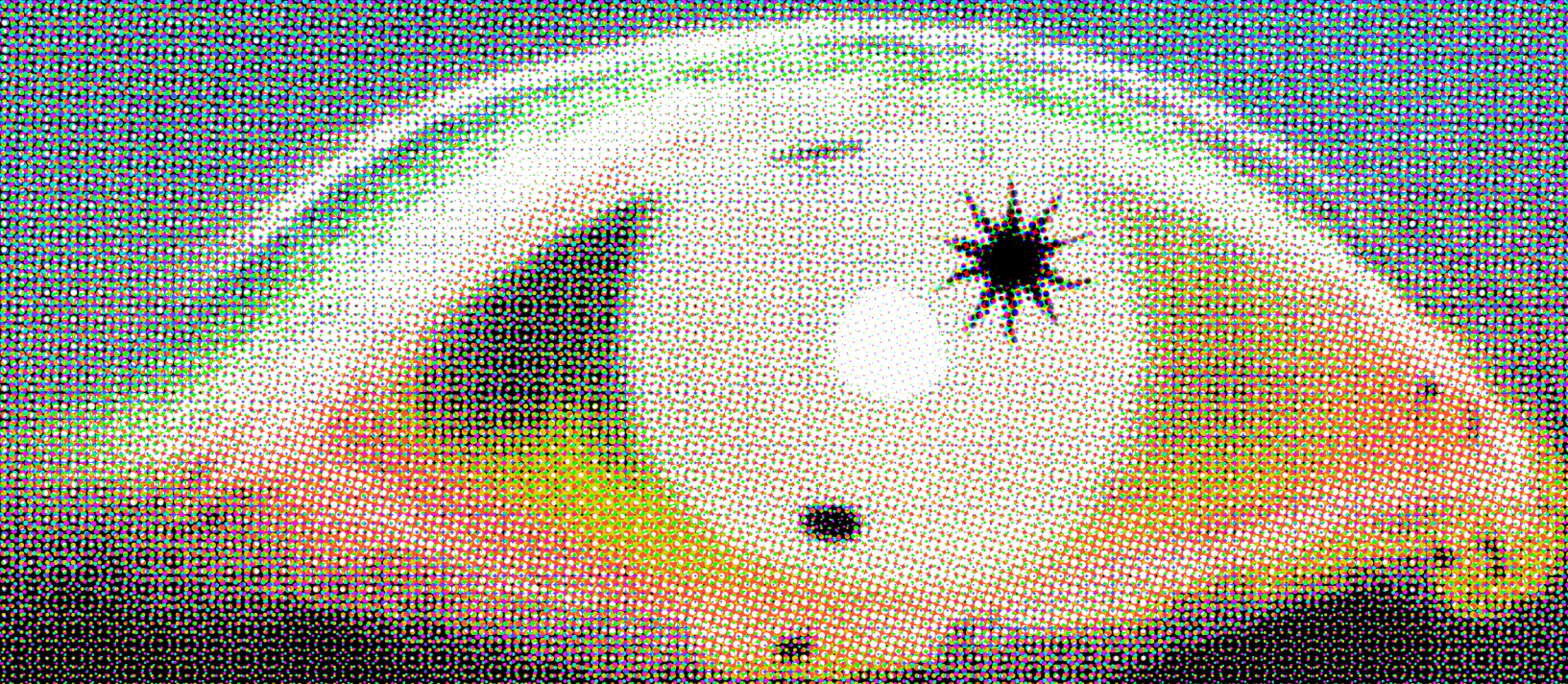
dream time

Poetry collection



From My Bookshelf To Yours, Beloveds
dinner parties, lost things, coral reefs, fever dreams, distant shores
spring/summer 2025

The Witch in the Grass

by Sarah Morgan Bryan Piatt

"My mother says I must not pass
    Too near that glass;
She is afraid that I will see
A little witch that looks like me,
With a red, red mouth, to whisper low
The very thing I should not know!"

Alack for all your mother's care!
    A bird of the air,
A wistful wind, or (I suppose
Sent by some hapless boy) a rose
With breath too sweet, will whisper low
The very thing you should not know!

I Was Sleeping Where the Black Oaks Move

By Louise Erdrich

We watched from the house
as the river grew, helpless
and terrible in its unfamiliar body.
Wrestling everything into it,
the water wrapped around trees
until their life-hold was broken.
They went down, one by one,
and the river dragged off their covering.

Nests of the herons, roots washed to bones,
snags of soaked bark on the shoreline:
a whole forest pulled through the teeth
of the spillway. Trees surfacing
singly, where the river poured off
into arteries for fields below the reservation.

When at last it was over, the long removal,
they had all become the same dry wood.
We walked among them, the branches
whitening in the raw sun.
Above us drifted herons,
alone, hoarse-voiced, broken,
settling their beaks among the hollows.
Grandpa said, *These are the ghosts of the tree people*
moving among us, unable to take their rest.

Sometimes now, we dream our way back to the heron dance.
Their long wings are bending the air
into circles through which they fall.
They rise again in shifting wheels.
How long must we live in the broken figures
their necks make, narrowing the sky.

WENDELL BERRY

PRAYER AFTER EATING

I have taken in the light
that quickened eye and leaf.
May my brain be bright with praise
of what I eat, in the brief blaze
of motion and of thought.
May I be worthy of my meat.

Their Beauty Has More Meaning

Robinson Jeffers

Yesterday morning enormous the moon hung low on the
ocean,
Round and yellow-rose in the glow of dawn;
The night-herons flapping home from the west looked
golden. Today

Dear One Absent This Long While

By Lisa Olstein

It has been so wet stones glaze in moss;
everything blooms coldly.

I expect you. I thought one night it was you
at the base of the drive, you at the foot of the stairs,

you in a shiver of light, but each time
leaves in wind revealed themselves,

the retreating shadow of a fox, daybreak.
We expect you, cat and I, bluebirds and I, the stove.

In May we dreamed of wreaths burning on bonfires
over which young men and women leapt.

June efforts quietly.
I've planted vegetables along each garden wall

so even if spring continues to disappoint
we can say at least the lettuce loved the rain.

I have new gloves and a new hoe.
I practice eulogies. He was a hawk

with white feathered legs. She had the quiet ribs
of a salamander crossing the old pony post road.

Yours is the name the leaves chatter
at the edge of the unrabbited woods.

Letters from Yorkshire

Maura Dooley

In February, digging his garden, planting potatoes,
he saw the first lapwings return and came
indoors to write to me, his knuckles singing

as they reddened in the warmth.
It's not romance, simply how things are.
You out there, in the cold, seeing the seasons

turning, me with my heartful of headlines
feeding words onto a blank screen.
Is your life more real because you dig and sow?

You wouldn't say so, breaking ice on a waterbutt,
clearing a path through snow. Still, it's you

who sends me word of that other world
pouring air and light into an envelope. So that
at night, watching the same news in different houses,
our souls tap out messages across the icy miles.

Change

by Audre Lorde

In whose bed
did I lie asweat
as the first thrush sounded
telling myself stories
of someone I used to be
hurling myself
at the unfamiliar shore
taunting the rocks' long shadow
till the waves beat my rage
back to spindrift
and my wars came home?

The girls who live
at the edge of the calm pool

where the moon rises
teach me
to leave dreams alone.

Grass Moon

Matthew Dickman

Last night I asked the ceiling
what was going to happen,
and it said this is what
is going to happen: you will have to
stay in your body for much longer
than you really want to,
and I thought about how nice it felt
the first time I shaved my head
and walked out into the rain
and how the rain walked
all over my head
and how when I hear someone yelling
something at someone else,
when I hear someone throwing
something across a room,
I want the world to be my laundry—
quiet and good and neatly folded away.

Appetite [Maxine Kumin]

I eat these
wild red raspberries
still warm from the sun
and smelling faintly of jewelweed
in memory of my father

tucking the napkin
under his chin and bending
over an ironstone bowl
of the bright drupelets
awash in cream

my father
with the sigh of a man
who has seen all and been redeemed
said time after time
as he lifted his spoon

men kill for this.

The Shampoo [Elizabeth Bishop]

The still explosions on the rocks,
the lichens, grow
by spreading, gray, concentric shocks.
They have arranged
to meet the rings around the moon, although
within our memories they have not changed.

And since the heavens will attend
as long on us,
you've been, dear friend,
precipitate and pragmatical;
and look what happens. For Time is
nothing if not amenable.

The shooting stars in your black hair
in bright formation
are flocking where,
so straight, so soon?
—Come, let me wash it in this big tin basin,
battered and shiny like the moon.

Two Trees [Don Paterson]

One morning, Don Miguel got out of bed
with one idea rooted in his head:
to graft his orange to his lemon tree.
It took him the whole day to work them free,
lay open their sides, and lash them tight.
For twelve months, from the shame or from the fright
they put forth nothing; but one day there appeared
two lights in the dark leaves. Over the years
the limbs would get themselves so tangled up
each bough looked like it gave a double crop,
and not one kid in the village didn't know
the magic tree in Miguel's patio.

The man who bought the house had had no dream
so who can say what dark malicious whim
led him to take his axe and split the bole
along its fused seam, and then dig two holes.
And no, they did not die from solitude;
nor did their branches bear a sterile fruit;
nor did their unhealed flanks weep every spring
for those four yards that lost them everything
as each strained on its shackled root to face
the other's empty intricate embrace.
They were trees, and trees don't weep or ache or shout.
And trees are all this poem is about.

Eating Together

BY LI-YOUNG LEE

In the steamer is the trout
seasoned with slivers of ginger,
two sprigs of green onion, and sesame oil.
We shall eat it with rice for lunch,
brothers, sister, my mother who will
taste the sweetest meat of the head,
holding it between her fingers
deftly, the way my father did
weeks ago. Then he lay down
to sleep like a snow-covered road
winding through pines older than him,
without any travelers, and lonely for no one.

Still, Life

BY IEVA DAPKEVICIUS

Cheese wedges, their white
flat as the shock of exposed bone;
the purple heart of each
shadow suspended like a plum
in slow dim jelly;
stone of fruit held between teeth
(flash of white):
a name spat out; the tawny, bright
sunbeams piercing glass and wine
as a knife of gold slicing through this,
our hollow daily bread.

Still, life
is hallowed by the ordinary: the play of light
against that which, while not yet rotting, is
already dead.

In Butch Is A Noun [S. Bear Bergman]

Your Faithful Servant

Let me take that for you. No, kiddo, you don't have to carry anything, you go right ahead and I'll just make a couple of trips. Get in the house where it's warm. It's not that heavy. I can get it. This is dirty, you don't want to touch it. I'll wrestle with it, if you could just get me a towel? Let me drop you off, it's raining pretty hard. I'll go get the car. It's not that cold. Sure, I can help you. Three flights of stairs isn't that much. You don't have to take the shuttle, I'll pick you up. Four a.m. isn't that early. It'll give me a good start on the rest of the day. It'll be nice to have your company. Let me drive. You worked all day. I'll get this check. No, no, you can get the next one. Did I say that last time? You can leave the tip, how about that. Just tell me what you want to do whenever you decide. Last minute is okay. See if any of the other things you'd rather do work out, and if not it'll be nice to see you. I don't mind, I want you to have what you want. Don't worry about that, I'll take care of it. Let me make a few calls for you. Hold on, I have the number right here. Did you want me to go with you? I'd be happy to; it's no trouble at all. Sure, I have time. I always have time for you. Here's an extra twenty bucks. Pay me back when you can. I don't want you driving around with no cash at all. Are you cold? Take my coat. No, it's not bad out. Here, I have an extra sweatshirt in the car. Go ahead and take the last of it. I'm not that hungry today. Call me any time, day or night. I just want you to understand that I'm here for whatever you need. Yup, I can give you directions. Sure, I have stamps. No, baby, that was great, just let me hold you know. Let me run out, it'll just take a second. I'll be back before you know it, and then you won't have to wait until morning. Sure, I'll look at it right now. It's no trouble. Sure, I can wait. Just let me know when you're ready, we can go. Sure, I'll come over and bring my tools. I don't mind. Sure, I have time. I always have time for you. Sure, whatever you need. Whatever you need.
Me? I'm all set. Thanks, though.

Two-Headed Calf

Laura Gilpin

Tomorrow when the farm boys find this
freak of nature, they will wrap his body
in newspaper and carry him to the museum.

But tonight he is alive and in the north
field with his mother. It is a perfect
summer evening: the moon rising over
the orchard, the wind in the grass. And
as he stares into the sky, there are
twice as many stars as usual.

Perhaps the World Ends Here

BY JOY HARJO

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.

“On the Back Porch” by Dorianne Laux

On the porch I bend and pour
brown soy stars into her bowl,
stroke her dark fur.
It’s not quite night.
Pinpricks of light in the eastern sky.
Above my neighbor’s roof, a transparent
moon, a pink rag of cloud.
Inside my house are those who love me.
My daughter dusts biscuit dough.
And there’s a man who will lift my hair
in his hands, brush it
until it throws sparks.
Everything is just as I’ve left it.
Dinner simmers on the stove.
Glass bowls wait to be filled
with gold broth. Sprigs of parsley
on the cutting board.
I want to smell this rich soup, the air
around me going dark, as stars press
their simple shapes into the sky.
I want to stay on the back porch
while the world tilts
toward sleep, until what I love
misses me, and calls me in.

September garden party

by Jane Kenyon

We sit with friends at the round
glass table. The talk is clever;
everyone rises to it. Bees
come to the spiral pear peelings
on your plate.
From my lap or your hand
the spice of our morning’s privacy
comes drifting up. Fall sun
passes through the wine.

Death Comes to Me Again, A Girl

Death comes to me again, a girl in a cotton slip.
Barefoot, giggling. It's not so terrible she tells me,
not like you think, all darkness and silence.

There are wind chimes and the smell of lemons.
Some days it rains. But more often the air
is dry and sweet. I sit beneath the staircase
built from hair and bone and listen
to the voices of the living.

I like it, she says, shaking the dust from her hair,
especially when they fight, and when they sing.

by Dorianne Laux

The Orange

At lunchtime I bought a huge orange—
The size of it made us all laugh.
I peeled it and shared it with Robert and
Dave—
They got quarters and I had a half.

And that orange, it made me so happy,
As ordinary things often do
Just lately. The shopping. A walk in the park.
This is peace and contentment. It's new.

The rest of the day was quite easy.
I did all the jobs on my list
And enjoyed them and had some time over.
I love you. I'm glad I exist.

— Wendy Cope

I THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE MY LIFE

by Yang Qingxiang

I used to take a walk after rain
on other people's foorsteps.

Twin shells rest in the sand,
kissed by rolling waves.

I was going to build a home there, to listen to
the wind in different seasons.

To read books written by someone afar, and wake
in the bell chime from across the water.

I cry and dry my tears.
I love, from the deepest of my tender heart.

I was going to write you a long letter in the moonlight,
occupying my mind with the ten thousand things at
dusk.

Have children, and tell stories under a tree,
tend to the rice field, and leave the mountains green
when I die.

I was prepared to do that, I thought:
— This would be my life.

Translated by Duck Yard Lyricists, a group of devoted poetry lovers: Meifu Wang, Michael Soper, Peter Micic & Johan Ramaekers

I knew something was wrong [Dorthea Grossman]

I knew something was wrong
the day I tried to pick up a
small piece of sunlight
and it slithered through my fingers,
not wanting to take shape.
Everything else stayed the same—
the chairs and the carpet
and all the corners
where the waiting continued.

Hong Kong [Sue Zhao]

When I didn't know how to live
I became my grandmother:
opening windows in the morning
early enough to see the light
sifting between the curtains, I
swept the floor with a bamboo broomstick
and made breakfast.

And in my head came her raspy
voice and her soft voice and her
quiet voice; which rarely laughed but was
always delighted with living and
eighty years of reticent habits
cultivated by her small hands.

She had not always been loved, so
she knew all about love.

And on days which were longer and longer still,
on returning home to an empty apartment
in that spectacular city - her voice
emanated like bells.

You must be hungry, she said, looking over
at what I was cooking. And I laid my head
in the lap of her voice, nodding.
I am, I am.

I Dreamed I Forgot [Leila Chatti]

I dreamed I forgot you
but to dream you was remembering.
I have words for you
only, a linguistic fidelity.
Cherish and *anguish* and *fool*.
I look for you, I am finding
out if i am brave. Last
I saw you, it was the same disruptive
season: robins trilling in the young
Flush, trees shivering
Pink all down the street
I thought the ache would ruin me, and maybe it did.
Here I am in the beatific after
Still calling back to you.

Life to the last drop in A River Dies of Thirst: Journals [Mahamoud Darwish]

> If someone said to me again: 'Supposing you were to die tomorrow, what would you do?' I wouldn't need any time to reply. If I felt drowsy, I would sleep. If I was thirsty, I would drink. If I was writing, I might like what I was writing and ignore the question. If I was having lunch, I would add a little mustard and pepper to the slice of grilled meat. If I was shaving, I might cut my earlobe. If I was kissing my girlfriend, I would devour her lips as if they were figs. If I was reading, I would skip a few pages. If I was peeling an onion, I would shed a few tears. If I was walking, I would continue walking at a slower pace. If I existed, as I do now, then I wouldn't think about not existing. If I didn't exist, then the question wouldn't bother me. If I was listening to Mozart, I would already be close to the realms of the angels. If I was asleep, I would carry on sleeping and dream blissfully of gardenias. If I was laughing, I would cut my laughter by half out of respect for the information. What else could I do, even if I was braver than an idiot and stronger than Hercules?

Miss you. Would like to grab that chilled tofu we love.

BY GABRIELLE CALVOCORESSI

Do not care if you bring only your light body.
Would just be so happy to sit at the table
and talk about the menu. Miss you.
Wish we could bet which chilis they'll put
on the cubes of tofu. Our favorite.
Sometimes green. Sometimes red. Roasted
we always thought. But so cold and fresh.
How did they do it? Wish you could be here
to talk about it like it was so important.
Wish you could. Watched you on the screens
as I was walking, as I was cooking. Wished you
could get out of the hospital. Can't
bring myself to order our dish and eat it
in the car. Miss you laughing. Miss
you coming in from the cold or one
too many meetings. Laughing. I'll order
already. I'll order seven helpings, some
dumplings, those cold yam noodles that you
like. You can come in your light
body or skeleton or be invisible I don't even
care. Know you have a long way to travel.
Know I don't even know if it's long

Sleeping In The Forest

[Mary Oliver]

I thought the earth
remembered me, she
took me back so tenderly, arranging
her dark skirts, her pockets
full of lichens and seeds. I slept
as never before, a stone
on the riverbed, nothing
between me and the white fire of the stars
but my thoughts, and they floated
light as moths among the branches
of the perfect trees. All night
I heard the small kingdoms breathing
around me, the insects, and the birds
who do their work in the darkness. All night
I rose and fell, as if in water, grappling
with a luminous doom. By morning
I had vanished at least a dozen times
into something better.

The Rosehead Nail

[A. E. Stallings]

"But can you forge a nail?" the blond boy asks,
And the blacksmith shoves a length of iron rod
Deep in the coal fire cherished by the bellows
Until it glows volcanic. He was a god
Before anachronism, before the tasks
That had been craft were jobbed out to machine.
By dint of hammer-song he makes his keen,
Raw point, and crowns utility with rose:
Quincunx of facets petaling its head.
The breeze-made-visible sidewinds. The boy's
Blonde mother shifts and coughs. *Once Work was wed*
To Loveliness — sweat-faced, swarthy from soot, he
Reminds us with the old saw he employs
(And doesn't miss a beat): "Smoke follows beauty."

This Bus Stop Was A Coral Reef, Once

[Megan Arkenberg]

Twenty thousand years ago, she said,
this whole city was the floor of an ocean
six thousand feet deep.
That's why when you put your ear
to the shell of an airplane, you hear waves.
That's why the ghosts in your apartment
are so big and hungry.

Initiation Song from the Finder's Lodge

[Ursula K. Le Guin]

Please bring strange things.
Please come bringing new things.
Let very old things come into your hands.
Let what you do not know come into your eyes.
Let desert sand harden your feet.
Let the arch of your feet be the mountains.
Let the paths of your fingertips be your maps
and the ways you go be the lines on your palms.
Let there be deep snow in your inbreathing
and your outbreath be the shining of ice.
May your mouth contain the shapes of strange words.
May you smell food cooking you have not eaten.
May the spring of a foreign river be your navel.
May your soul be at home where there are no houses.
Walk carefully, well loved one,
walk mindfully, well loved one,
walk fearlessly, well loved one.
Return with us, return to us,
be always coming home.

A Pot of Red Lentils

BY PETER PEREIRA

simmers on the kitchen stove.
All afternoon dense kernels
surrender to the fertile
juices, their tender bellies
swelling with delight.

In the yard we plant
rhubarb, cauliflower, and artichokes,
cupping wet earth over tubers,
our labor the germ
of later sustenance and renewal.

Across the field the sound of a baby crying
as we carry in the last carrots,
whorls of butter lettuce,
a basket of red potatoes.

I want to remember us this way—
late September sun streaming through
the window, bread loaves and golden
bunches of grapes on the table,
spoonfuls of hot soup rising
to our lips, filling us
with what endures.

cleaning a fish

dave smith

In her hand the knife, brisk, brilliant as moon-claw,
shaves the flesh. It grazes the white
belly just over the heart.
Underneath, the coiled fingers
are cradling a soft flesh
as if it were the jowls of the aged

man propped for a while on the bench in the park.
The head is not severed, the eyes not out.
Blue, they appear to flash odd ways
where a tree makes a live shadow.
Mostly the eyes are dead.
Nothing is in them

except the intense blue of sky the tree allows.
There is no conspiring of nerves,
no least event recalled
by a limb's high arching,
or even a girl's ascension
from a forgotten distance of water.

But there is something as she lifts the meat.
It is enough to draw down her gaze.
Now her arm rises against
yellow hair fallen
white in a childish face.
She is still as a leaf barely clinging.

I come to her like a cat in the stunned grass
and touch her to see the startled,
upthrusted gleam of her face.
At brow and each cheek
like gathered beads of mist
scales leap with the sun, and are dead.

No word passes between us, but something electric
as a flash of steel makes her
cry out just once. Squatting
at the yard's edge, she
sings beyond any thought.
Her knife flies as lethal as love
and cuts quickly in like a hurried kiss.

Windigo

BY LOUISE ERDRICH

For Angela

The Windigo is a flesh-eating, wintry demon with a man buried deep inside of it. In some Chippewa stories, a young girl vanquishes this monster by forcing boiling lard down its throat, thereby releasing the human at the core of ice.

You knew I was coming for you, little one,
when the kettle jumped into the fire.
Towels flapped on the hooks,
and the dog crept off, groaning,
to the deepest part of the woods.

In the hackles of dry brush a thin laughter started up.
Mother scolded the food warm and smooth in the pot
and called you to eat.
But I spoke in the cold trees:
New one, I have come for you, child hide and lie still.

The sumac pushed sour red cones through the air.
Copper burned in the raw wood.
You saw me drag toward you.
Oh touch me, I murmured, and licked the soles of your feet.
You dug your hands into my pale, melting fur.

I stole you off, a huge thing in my bristling armor.
Steam rolled from my wintry arms, each leaf shivered
from the bushes we passed
until they stood, naked, spread like the cleaned spines of fish.

Then your warm hands hummed over and shoveled themselves full
of the ice and the snow. I would darken and spill
all night running, until at last morning broke the cold earth
and I carried you home,
a river shaking in the sun.

Evil Eye

[A. E. Stallings]

"Yes, it's on you," Kalliópe frowns,
Dribbling amber beads of olive oil
Down her fingers into the water glass
Where they amass
In one big cyclops-blob, and do not scatter.

Something, it seems, always *is* the matter:
Vague pains, or clumsy accidents, a dim
Nimbus on my head, a personal cloud.
Perhaps she *is* endowed
With second sight. I'm lifted by a loss

As she thumbs my forehead with a cross;
Anointed, for a moment, I forget
The failed rehearsals of a mirth, and grief
Floods me like relief.
Yes, something's wrong, something she can *see*.

Even you glance differently at me
For half a second, though we do not believe
In village superstition. Still, we ask,
And she performs the task:
I always have it, and she always takes

It off of me (which gives her stomachaches.)
And though we're grateful, we do not offer thanks—
That would undo it somehow. We walk out
Like shadows of a doubt
Into the changed look of the afternoon.